

2 February 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Handling and Protection of OSS Records Held by  
the National Archives and Records Service (NARS)

1. The bulk of the OSS records accessioned by NARS has been assigned to Record Group 226. Custody of the records is divided between the Military Archives Division (Modern Military Branch) and the Civil Archives Division (Diplomatic Branch). Nontextual records are maintained by the Cartographic Archives Division (1,701 maps) and the Audiovisual Archives Division (24 motion pictures and 228 still photographs). For the most part, these records represent the files of the now-defunct Research and Analysis Branch of OSS. The Diplomatic Branch has the finished intelligence studies (approximately 3,500 items) and the Modern Military Branch has the office files and the card index (estimated at 918 cubic feet of records).

2. A limited quantity of OSS records are to be found in Record Group 239 (Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historical Monuments in War Areas), and, of course, copies of OSS-originated documents are often discovered in the files deposited at NARS by the Department of State and Department of Defense components. (Indeed, the publications held by the Diplomatic Branch, noted in paragraph 1, are technically a part of Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State.)

3. A researcher interested in delving into OSS records would normally be directed to the Modern Military Branch. John E. Taylor, an archivist of considerable experience and tenure, services virtually all of the research requests. He stated that the file was very active from the standpoint of reference service, with free lance writers, college professors, and graduate students utilizing it. (This is a subjective judgment, of course. Apparently only 17 papers--books, articles, dissertations--were researched against the OSS file during the period 1962-67.) A representative researcher will work in the files for 3-5 weeks; one researcher devoted a total of 13 weeks (over a period of 10 months) to research in the OSS papers.

4. Prior to 11 January 1972, access to the OSS records in Modern Military Branch was limited to US citizens with a special clearance from the Department of State. Would-be researchers were required to submit to the State Historical Office a written statement on the purpose of the research and a completed biographic summary form. A National Agency Check was completed before access was granted.

5. Cleared researchers were provided portions of the 3x5 card index to R&A records. The card index consists of two main segments: an index of personality names which appear in OSS files; and an index broken down by country and, within country, by an hierarchical subject code. The index cards reference some documents produced by other government agencies and foreign governments, plus some OSS documents not held by NARS. The researcher examined the card index in the branch's search room, where he was under constant surveillance by a member of the staff. When the researcher had selected document references possibly germane to his research topic, the documents were retrieved from the stack area and screened by John Taylor. Taylor removed classified documents of foreign origin and documents from other US agencies (if classified or otherwise restricted). OSS documents were also reviewed and withheld if they seemed to reveal intelligence methods and sources or foreign liaison arrangements. The researcher was permitted to take notes, but the notes were submitted to the State Historical Office for its scrutiny, and occasionally material was removed by State officials before forwarding the notes to the researcher.

6. After 11 January 1972 the files were opened to all researchers without regard to clearances or citizenship. Taylor continued to screen out questionable documents.

7. In May 1972 NARS received a letter from State authorizing the declassification of OSS records. When NARS requested further clarification, the Department proposed a CIA review. You are better informed on the followup actions than I am.

8. Beginning some time in early January 1973 (Taylor was on sick leave at the time and is uncertain of the exact day), a decision was made to provide researchers with copies of OSS documents. Taylor opines that the decision was made by the three CIA declassification officers and Allan Thompson. Taylor declassifies documents on his own, referring questionable cases to the CIA officers.

9. Most of the finished OSS products which were integrated into Record Group 59 have already been declassified. Approximately 625 reports were declassified in July 1950 and most of the others in 1972. Many of them (reference aids, country surveys, etc.) were never classified. If OSS documents should happen to turn up in other State Department files being pulled for requesters, they are deposited in an envelope in the Archives box and held for later declassification action, assuming, of course, that the documents were classified or otherwise restricted.

10. The Audiovisual Archives Division places no restrictions on researcher access to OSS-produced motion picture films and still photographs, according to the briefing I received. I will not be visiting the Cartographic Archives Division until 14 February and am therefore uninformed regarding its access policies.

11. The OSS papers in Record Group 239 seem to consist primarily of 13 detailed interrogation reports and 4 very lengthy consolidated interrogation reports. A few private researchers have looked at the files. The archivist in charge, Mike Simmons, said that official permission was obtained in all instances. Three names of researchers were supplied me by Mike Simmons--Phil Mancha, Julia Morgan, and Matilda Simon. Matilda Simon authored a book, The Battle of the Louve, which references some of the documents in the bibliography. Declassification of the records was requested in 1959, but the Agency refused the request. Mike Simmons showed me correspondence from the Agency okaying researcher access to the files. The memos were signed by [REDACTED] Record Group 239 has had a rather tortured history. The documents were deposited with NARS and then subsequently retrieved (by Ardelia Hall of State). Following Ardelia Hall's retirement from the Department, some of the records went to the Alexandria Records Center and some were returned to NARS. Mike Simmons indicated that some of the records are now mixed up with another record group; he did not specify which one.

12. John Taylor has not yet prepared a list of research topics involved in 1968-72 utilization of the R&A files. He has also promised to provide an estimate (but no names) of the number of researchers involved.

STATINTL



Attachments: A. Registration Statement for Record Group No. 226  
B. Research Topics, Record Group No. 226, 1962-67